

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

A275.2
Ex824

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
LIBRARY



BOOK NUMBER

A275.2
Ex824

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Federal Extension Service
Washington 25, D. C.

PRINCIPLES OF EXTENSION TEACHING /1

Fred P. Frutchey
Division of Extension Research and Training

The Nature of Extension Work. - Agricultural extension work in the United States is a system of rural education extending beyond the classroom of school and college to the individual farm. It is available to every member of every farm family in the United States. Participation by the farm families is entirely voluntary.

Extension work is a system whereby scientific information dealing with agriculture and home economics is carried to rural men, women, boys, and girls on their farms, in their homes, and in their local communities. It is conducted by trained men and women who live in the communities whose people they serve. These county extension agents are men and women graduates of the agricultural colleges and have seasoned judgment acquired through practical experience.

The responsibilities of the extension agents are very broad. They are friends of the rural people. They are teachers, teaching people how to think not what to think. They help rural people appreciate the value of improved methods of farming and homemaking. They draw upon their wide scientific knowledge of agriculture and home economics in helping farm people solve practical problems. They have the help of unpaid volunteer local leaders. Administratively they are responsible to Federal, State and county governmental bodies.

County extension agents are supported in their work by the technical staff at the colleges of agriculture in the States and in the United States Department of Agriculture.

Extension work is nonpolitical and plays no part in regulatory, police legislative, or administrative affairs of the Federal, State, or local Governments. Extension work is based on the Jeffersonian principle of public education. Jefferson insisted that education be public and universal. Only through the education of the people did Jefferson believe that people who live together and work together can get along together. He recognized the great contributions of science, if applied in practice by "those who labor in the earth."

/1 Based on a paper prepared for the Tenth Chilean General Scientific Congress held in Santiago under the auspices of the Scientific Society of Chile, January 1944.

Throughout the brief history of extension work, general principles of education have been applied and tested. Some of these which have been found to have more or less general application in most sections of the United States are here briefly described.

1. Principle of Cultural Differences.- The first important principle is the principle of cultural differences. In order for teaching to be effective the approaches and procedures must be suited to the culture of the people who are taught. A brief description of extension work in the United States is likely to leave one with the impression that extension work is the same in all parts of the country. This is not true. It is conducted somewhat differently in each of the 48 States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico, owing to different ways of living and doing things. Extension work with people in New Mexico is different from that in Pennsylvania, and in each of these States the work is different from that in Iowa. An important reason is that the cultural background of the people is different.

When a new extension agent goes into a community, he makes a point of learning its history and cultural background, what values the people hold dear, how they proceed to reach their values, what organizations exist, and who are the leaders in the community.

The obvious differences in type of farming, degree of mechanization, and size of farms are easy to observe. The subtle differences in ways of life, attitudes, values, loyalties, and customs are not so easy to recognize. An extension agent must be alert to these differences if his work is to be effective.

A blueprint of work in one part of the United States cannot be applied effectively to another part. A blueprint of work designed for one area of the globe cannot be applied effectively to another area. The blueprint is useful, however, as a source from which to select and test ideas under the cultural conditions of the new area. When the ideas do not work, new techniques, specifically appropriate to the cultures, need to be invented. Different cultures require different approaches.

2. Principle of Cultural Change.- Extension work in the United States is in a process of continuous change. This is a wholesome situation. Change is the essence of growth and progress. With its growth and development Extension has changed to meet cultural changes among the people.

At the start of extension work, the confidence of the people had to be won. In the early days, personal service was a key feature of the work. Rural people had to be convinced that extension agents had something of value to them, that science had practical value to rural people in the things they were mostly concerned with. The agent did this largely through personal help to an individual farmer who had the respect of his neighbors. When the farmer found through actual trial that the recommended ideas and practices brought desired results, he gained confidence in the extension agent.

The farmer agreed to the use of his farm for a demonstration of a recommended practice. Neighbors came and saw for themselves and told others. The word got around. The extension agent was worth something to them. They took ideas and practices based on the best scientific research and applied them themselves. They had confidence in him. They could discuss their problems with him.

The educational stature of extension work grew. From these little beginning points it spread over the community, slowly in some places and more rapidly in others.

In the early days of Extension work, emphasis was on improved practices in food production. Today there is increasing emphasis on improved marketing practices. As needs of rural people changed extension work has changed. The emphasis in Extension work of 20 years ago are quite different from those of today. Likewise those of today are quite different from the emphasis 20 years from today. Extension work changes as conditions change.

3. Grass-Roots Principle of Organization. -Groups of rural people in local communities sponsor extension work. County extension agents enlist the interest of these local groups in new farm and home practices and programs originating at State agricultural colleges and/or in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and fit the programs to the local conditions. In many communities the initiation of extension work was fostered by the agricultural college, but the work was not introduced until there was a local group sufficiently interested in sponsoring it. The aim of the local group was to demonstrate the value of the new practices or program so that more and more families would participate.

4. Principle of Cooperation. - Extension work is cooperative. The basis for its operation is the cooperative agreements made between the United States Department of Agriculture, the State agricultural colleges the county governments, and the rural people themselves. The Extension Services cooperate on national programs set up through acts of Congress by informing rural America as to the provisions of the programs, so that rural people may understand the provisions and decide whether the programs will contribute to their welfare.

Financial support is likewise cooperative. Government funds come from three sources. The Federal Government provides about one-half, the State governments provide about one-fourth, and the county governments provide about one-fourth.

5. Principle of Interests and Needs. -Extension work is a system of voluntary education. To be effective it must begin with the interests of the families. It must meet those interests, and use them as a springboard for developing further interests. Many times the interests of the rural people are not the interests of the extension agent. Even though he sees the needs of the people better than they do themselves, he must begin with the interests and needs as they see them.

Once he has their confidence he can branch out and develop their interests into broader channels. His successful teaching is through the reconstruction of the experience of the people. Beginning with them, with their experience and their customs, he helps them to change their ways and progress in desirable directions.

6. Participation Principle - Learning by Doing.- Growth results from participation in the solution of problems. Good extension effort is directed toward assisting rural families to work out their own problems rather than giving them ready-made answers. People who study their own problems and work out solutions are more likely to assume responsibility for their own programs and develop leadership in the work. Experience in these things creates self-confidence. They learn to do by doing.

In developing responsibility for leadership, a local farmer is frequently called upon to preside at a meeting. The extension agent usually sits in the audience and is called upon for scientific information relating to the discussion. At times he may act as secretary of the meeting.

It takes patience and time in getting people unaccustomed to participating in group work, to reach the point where they assume initiative and responsibility. They learn through encouragement and by doing. Education is often a slow process.

7. Adaptability Principle in the Use of Teaching Methods. - People differ from one another. Groups differ from other groups. Conditions differ. No one teaching method is effective under all situations. Reading materials are for those who can read; radio programs for those who have radios; meetings for those who can attend; demonstrations of recommended practices are for those to see who can come to the farm on which the demonstration takes place. Farm and home visits, by far the most valuable method, take considerable time, however. New situations also arise where a special combination of methods is necessary.

Extension agents have found they need a repertory of teaching methods from which to select and revise the ones effective for the purpose and suited to the culture of the people. They think of their set of methods as a kit of tools to draw upon in getting a teaching job done, much as a scientist in his laboratory has equipment to draw upon in getting a research job done. At times new methods must be devised to meet new situations and changing conditions. The use of teaching methods must have flexibility.

8. Leadership Principle.- As extension work began in a county, the new agent soon found that in order to do all the work needed, he must have help. Leadership was available but in most cases unidentified. Developing this latent leadership was one of the agent's major jobs for extending extension work to more families. Qualities of leadership ability cropped out in the most unexpected places. Many people never knew they had any ability in this direction until extension work gave them the opportunity. The work they do is commensurate with their ability and the training extension agents give them. These leaders are local people. They are unpaid. They are voluntary leaders. They are farmers, their wives, and their older children.

During 1952 there were over 1,200,000 local voluntary leaders helping in Extension. They are officers of clubs and groups, leaders of 4-H Clubs, members of local committees, teachers of subject matter to other persons, demonstrators of recommended practices and so on. Short period training schools are held to prepare them for the specific jobs they have to do. Training of voluntary leaders in the work they do is essential to good extension work and is done by the county extension agents and the subject matter specialists from the college. Local leaders multiply the educational services of the county extension agents manifold. Good county extension agents attach much importance to local leadership in the county.

9. Principle of Trained Specialists. - Besides the nearly 7,000 county extension agents, either in agriculture or home economics or in 4-H Club work, including assistant agents and Negro agents, there are about 1,700 extension workers specially trained in subject-matter fields of agriculture, home economics, and related fields.

These extension specialists are charged with the responsibility of keeping in close touch with experimental research and of encouraging rural people to adopt practices proved sound by the agricultural experiment stations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the colleges. They are the connecting link between research and practice and keep county extension agents informed of new research. Not least important in their work, is translating research findings into practical applications and developing plans and methods for disseminating this information effectively.

It has been found important, too, that the specialist see not only his own subject-matter field in working on a farm or home problem but also other subject-matter fields related to the whole farm family problem thereby concentrating on the welfare of the whole family and making his special contribution.

10. Satisfaction Principle. - As rural families observe satisfactory results of extension work they look to it for more help. This principle needs little elaboration. It is the key to the success of the work. It is the key to the development of volunteer local leaders, who receive no salary. Good county extension agents are quick to see that volunteer leaders must obtain more than money satisfaction if the leaders are to continue in the work. Recognition of the volunteer leader by the rural people and by the extension agent, for the work well done, encourages continuing volunteer leadership.

11. Whole-Family Principle. - Extension work is for the whole family. There is the work in agriculture for the men and home economics for the women. Farm women numbering 1,432,783 were enrolled in home demonstration clubs in the United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico in 1952. One of the outstanding projects in Extension work is that which deals with the children of the family. About 2,016,000 boys and girls are now enrolled in 4-H Clubs.

There projects in agriculture and homemaking are designed to develop leadership and to create favorable attitudes toward the use of scientific information. 4-H Clubs have made remarkable contributions to the agricultural war effort. Discussion programs on timely and important questions are encouraged.

Carefully conducted studies using the methods of science have shown the influence of 4-H Club work on the lives of boys and girls who participate. A comparative study showed that 4-H Club boys had greater confidence in scientific information than non-4-H boys. In general, the results of the informal and "learning by doing" method of teaching may be summarized as follows: "4-H Club work is a worth-while constructive experience from which boys and girls gain much satisfaction." The boys and girls of today are the men and women of tomorrow.

Although extension work among farmers, farm women, and youth appears to be separate at first glance, there is much overlapping and integration in the family-approach of extension work.

12. Evaluation Principle.- Extension work is based on a belief in the methods of science. It, itself, must be scientific. Careful studies are made to determine how well the work is progressing, the degree to which extension is reaching its educational purpose, where and what can be done to improve it. The effectiveness of the work is measured insofar as it is possible to measure the changes in people resulting from the teaching process. Rapid advances have been made in the past 15 years, in measuring the so-called intangibles of education.

In many places, it is no longer enough to have only plans and methods, valuable as they are. It is necessary to determine the teaching results in an unbiased way. Extension workers want to know the facts.

A new educational program is often given a trial in a limited way and tested. The results are used as a basis for improving the procedures before they are carried out on a wider scale.

The application of the scientific method to social processes and social institutions is growing in the United States.

13. Principle of Applied Science and Democracy.- The methods of science are an essential part of the democratic process. Freedom of thought and the unbiased objective approach of the scientist establish facts used in the solution of problems. Extension work seeks to accomplish this in agriculture and rural living. Extension work translates scientific findings developed in the laboratories and on experimental farms in such a way that farm families can voluntarily adapt them to their own needs.

The results of research give a factual basis for the correction of common superstitions and unfounded beliefs that arose in the past from inaccurate observations and were passed along from generation to generation in the folkways of the people.

Applied agricultural science is not a one-way process. Problems of the people are taken to the scientists who do the experimenting necessary to find the solutions. Pure research is, of course, not stifled. To do so would be unwise, because often the pure research of today is the applied research of tomorrow. The proper balance of the two is desirable. The agricultural history of the United States has provided ample evidence that higher material standards of living are intimately associated with the application of science and education that reaches the people who farm the land.

The above are some of the major general principles of extension work in the United States. They are not universally applied in all parts of the country because of differences in types of farming, background, and culture of people in different sections. When they are applied under new circumstances, they usually are first tried experimentally and tested to see how well they work and how they can be properly changed to fit the conditions of the people.



